

REQUIREMENTS FOR COVER CROP INCENTIVE IN TENNESSEE

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) FY 2008

The primary purposes of a Cover Crop under the EQIP program in Tennessee are to reduce soil erosion and to increase the soil organic matter. Generally, eligible fields include those with current cropping systems used by the producer that do not control soil erosion at or below Tolerance (T) levels and/or the Soil Conditioning Index (SCI) is equal to or less than zero (0). Soil loss rates and soil conditioning indexes are calculated using the RUSLE2 model on field office computers. Also, a cover crop must not be part of the producer's current crop rotation on the operation.

In order for calculations to reflect accurate measurements, the crop rotations and tillage methods used over the previous two years should be used in the RUSLE2 model. Once the existing soil loss and SCI are determined for the current system, re-run the model using a cover crop, such as small grain, and determine the after soil loss and SCI. If the after erosion rates are to "T" or below or the SCI is positive after the use of a cover crop, then the producer is eligible for the practice. If erosion remains above "T" and the SCI at 0 or below, then the planner should work with the producer to consider other options such as higher residue no-till crops, terraces, contour strips, crop rotations and other practices along with the cover crop.

Cover crops are not eligible for harvesting of grain, except for the harvesting a portion as seed for planting the next cover crop. The objective is to continue the growth of the plant and production of biomass above and below the ground for as long as possible before the following crop is planted. In most cases, the cover crop should not be destroyed (burn down) more than 45 days prior to the planting the next crop. In order to benefit from nitrogen fixation by legume cover crops, the legume should be allowed to reach the late bloom stage prior to being killed. Small grain feed seed cannot be used to establish a cover crop.

Another eligible situation is using a cover crop for nutrient removal from the soil. This situation exists where heavy volumes of animal wastes have been applied to crop fields over several years. In this situation, cover crops are planted to remove the possible P and K buildups by actually harvesting the crop and the biomass. In the case of small grains, the complete entire plant above the stubble is removed from the field as straw and grain. The use of cover crops for nutrient removal requires a CNMP Nutrient Management Plan detailing application and removal rates. Specialists at the area and state level will provide planning assistance for implementation.

In a growing season following drought, cover crops may be grazed or hayed to supplement livestock needs. Cover crop cannot be grazed lower than 4 inches. Hay can only be harvested once. This option must be requested through the EQIP Program Manager, and the County Emergency Board must submit a drought report to the State Emergency Board.

A cover crop cannot be used for the production of grain, seed, hay, straw, or grazing that is for sale or marketed for profit.

Refer the Tennessee Standard Cover Crop (340) posted in the eFOTG, Section IV for additional information.